

Original Paper

The Impact of Brand Equity Dimensions on Consumers Word of Mouth—The Case of Sports Goods in Lebanese Shopping Malls

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Abstract

Word of mouth has adapted societal development. Word of mouth plays an essential role in shaping consumer behavior. Consumers' word of mouth is directly influenced by brand equity dimensions. Consumers' perception of a brand is formed by consumers' awareness, association, and its image, it represents an important variable that marketers should not neglect. The objective of this article is to study the influence of brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty as brand equity dimensions on consumers' word of mouth. Therefore, the positivism philosophy favoring a causal type model was used to test the cause-effect relationship forming the research hypotheses. Primary data was collected using a quantitative method with a deductive approach based on a structured questionnaire. This study is carried out on a total sample of 800 individuals (n = 800). The empirical study supported the research hypotheses through the analysis of the one-way ANOVA and multiple linear regression stepwise. Finally, the last section embraced suitable recommendations for this article.

Keywords

consumers' word of mouth, brand equity dimensions, cause-effect relationship

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the word of mouth among consumers has become a major marketing tool. This is not a new phenomenon; word of mouth has always played a big role in shaping consumer behavior. Word of mouth involves a message about a brand that is transferred from one individual to another either face-to-face or through another means of communication (Feng & Papatla, 2011). According to Peres, Shachar, and Lovett (2012), consumers' word of mouth is directly influenced by brand equity

dimensions. Richins (2012) argued that brand awareness and brand image are the two major dimensions that have the highest impact of spreading positive word of mouth. Besides, Ahmad and Laroche, (2017) have verified that consumers with higher brand loyalty are the brand ambassadors. Therefore, Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) deduced that brands highly depend on these brand ambassadors to market their products indirectly through the diffusion of positive word of mouth. Brand equity allows organizations to obtain a significant competitive advantage in a globalized and increasingly challenging environment.

Brand equity is an added value that a brand brings to a product. This is the additional advantage obtained, beyond the product and its intrinsic values. “Brand equity includes a series of associations and behaviors”, allowing the brand to gain greater added value. The additional effect is then detected by comparing the consumer’s reaction to the brand through consumers buying behaviors and word of mouth. The concept of brand equity involves putting in place the resources of managing the brand by exploiting and preserving its capital, its value. Understanding the mechanism of consumer perception and reaction is essential to act on it (Mehyar, Saeed, Al-Ja’afreh, & Al-Adaileh, 2020).

The two main sources mentioned in the literature are brand image, brand awareness, and the specific associations that result from it. Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) following the original work of Keller revealed that the different dimensions of brand equity are those relating to consumer perception (“awareness”, brand associations, perceived quality) and those related to behavior (loyalty). The brand then becomes a set of concrete and symbolic manifestations with a direct influence on consumers’ behaviors namely the consumers’ word of mouth.

Besides, marketers have declared that companies depend on consumers’ word of mouth due to its objectivity. However, researchers have proven that marketing strategies have little control over consumers’ word of mouth, a form of brand advertising, and the globalization of exchanges between individuals only aggravates this phenomenon (Moldovan, Goldenberg, & Chattopadhyay, 2011). The dependence of the company on the phenomenon of word of mouth and the importance of the influence of brand equity is at the origin of this study. Hence, the major research question guiding this study is: ***“what is the influence of brand equity of sports goods dimensions explicitly the brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty on consumers’ word of mouth?”***

Word of mouth whether in its viral or traditional form still occupies an important place in marketing strategy. Word of mouth has been adapted and modified throughout technological and societal development. This is why brand equity and consumers’ word of mouth is an interesting topic in marketing today to study.

The objective of this empirical study is to examine the variables that generate positive word of mouth towards the brand among Lebanese consumers. Therefore, the objective of this article is to study the influence of brand equity dimensions on consumers’ word of mouth. More precisely, it examines the

influence of brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty as brand equity dimensions on consumers' word of mouth.

This article is divided into five sections. The first section introduced the topic, the research question, and the research objective. The second section elaborates on the theoretical framework and constructs the research hypotheses and conceptual framework. The third section highlights the research method based on a qualitative study within a positivist philosophy while the fourth section analyzes and interprets the research empirical data. Lastly, the fifth section concludes this article and presents recommendations for further studies.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 The Theory of Brand Equity

From the consumer's point of view, called consumer-based brand equity, is a multidimensional concept which, originally proposed by Aaker, is composed of the following four dimensions (Liu et al., 2017): brand quality, loyalty brand, brand awareness, and the brand image formed by associations. In the literature, brand perception is conceptualized from the last two dimensions of brand equity, namely brand awareness and image, which explains why some studies have grouped them in a single category (Chatzipanagiotou, Veloutsou, & Christodoulides, 2016).

In other words, a consumer's perception of a brand depends on its image and brand association. On the other hand, the study by Girard et al. (2017) demonstrated that brand awareness is more influenced by traditional communication unlike the image of a brand that is influenced by direct communication. The brand image is formed through the process of consumer memory. According to the latter, the thoughts, opinions, and feelings experienced by consumers during an experience with the brand are recorded as knowledge and become associations that form the image of the brand (A. Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2014).

In a context of direct communication, it is through the plethora of interactions between consumers that they form the image of a brand and to modify its associations. This is why companies need to develop strong brand equity through its communications channels. Therefore, the marketing strategies adopted by a company should not be done for the sole purpose of generating the content, but also to promote their image. According to Foroudi et al. (2018), a positive perception on the part of consumers about the communication strategies, positively influences their perception of the brand.

In the terms of recent theories, Pinar, Trapp, Girard, and Boyt (2014) proposes a state model of the generative type, and thus remain inscribed in Keller and Aaker's perspective. The latter builds a model that aims to determine how brand equity takes shape, in the double sense of economic value and symbolic value. The theory that governs his approach is cognitivist, because, for Keller, what determines the ultimate value of a brand is the brand knowledge that consumers have of it, and the key factor in this knowledge is the consumer's memory or more precisely the traces that the brand has left in his memory (Sharma, Davcik, & Pillai, 2016).

Two particularly important components of brand equity are brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness is related to the brand trace in the memory of customers to recall or identify the brand under different conditions. Brand image is founded on the set of customer perceptions and preferences for a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in the consumer's memory. These associations include perceptions of quality and brand attitudes (loyalty) towards the brand. Likewise, Aaker proposes that brand associations are linked in memory to a brand (Stojanovic, Andreu, & Curras-Perez, 2018).

To conclude, brand equity embraces brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty as major dimensions. These dimensions are explained respectively.

2.1.1 Brand Awareness

According to Nyadzayo, Matanda and Ewing (2016), brand awareness is *“the ability of a customer to recognize or remember that a brand exists and belongs to a certain category of the product”*. Brand awareness is therefore the measure of the degree of presence of a brand in the minds of consumers. In other words, it is about the likelihood that the name of a brand comes to the mind of an individual and more particularly the ease with which the latter thinks about the brand.

A good brand awareness strategy, therefore, requires a multi-faceted approach from companies to improve brand engagement with current and future consumers. According to Šeric, Gil-Saura and Mollá-Descals (2016), it is necessary for brands to provide a virtually interactive environment and to publish credible, reliable, and authentic information that Internet users appreciate gaining an advantage over the competition.

The main goal of the marketing strategy is to increase brand awareness and association. In other words, the company that wants to increase its brand awareness will use different marketing resources that will allow it to reach its customers and thus make them aware that this brand exists and that it corresponds perfectly to their expectations (Foroudi et al., 2018). To ensure its reputation, a company must effectively present itself because this description will strongly guide a customer's decision in the choice of a product or a service (Pinar, Girard, & Eser, 2012).

Brand awareness influences consumer choice and its word of mouth. Indeed, the more a brand is known, the more likely it is that the consumer will consider it, choose it and recommend it later. A product resulting from the creation of a well-known brand will benefit from greater awareness among consumers. The market share of a known brand is greater than the assessment of the quality that originates from it (Lobschat et al., 2013). Therefore, a brand with high brand awareness has more influence on users' desire to buy and makes them recommend it more easily. Brand awareness, therefore, plays an important role in consumers' purchase intention because they tend to buy a familiar and well-known product.

In summary, brand awareness can help consumers remember, recognize a brand and its product category, then make a purchasing decision, and publishing creative content will mark the minds of consumers. Consequently, higher brand awareness creates a positive word of mouth (Phung, Ly, & Nguyen, 2019).

2.1.2 Brand Image

Keller defines brand image as the perception of the brand in the consumer's mind. These associations of ideas include perceptions of the quality of the brand and attitudes towards it. According to Aaker, the brand image helps create value for the company in several ways. Indeed, it allows better processing of information for consumers, differentiation of the brand, the creation of reasons to buy this brand, and favorable feelings (Phung, Ly, & Nguyen, 2019).

Lobschat et al. (2013), on the other hand, defined brand image as "the perceptions of a brand, reflected by the brand associations held in the consumer's mind". These brand associations constitute other nodes of information, linked to the brand, and contains the meaning of the brand for the consumer. In light of these definitions, brand image constitutes a concept of reception, in connection with the perception of consumers. It forms a unique set of mental associations that the brand manager aspires to create or maintain. These are therefore all the signals emitted by the company, intending to create a particular brand image among consumers. It corresponds to "*the way the company wants to present the brand in the market*" (Mohan et al., 2017). The brand image is therefore built based on very diverse elements such as products, customer experience, brand communication, and the communication around the brand. It is based on an individual's body of knowledge about the brand. Therefore, brand image has a direct influence on consumers' word of mouth. And consumers will tend to interpret the different elements to confirm their attitude towards the brand (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018).

In summary, the brand image "is the result of the synthesis made by the public of all the signs emitted by the brand". It corresponds to the decoding that consumers make based on the products, services, and communications transmitted by the brand. It reflects how the public interprets the brand identity element over which companies do not have direct control (Roy & Sarkar, 2015).

2.1.3 Perceived Quality

Perceived quality is considered as a dimension of brand equity rather than part of the overall brand association, it is the customer's judgment of the overall excellence or superiority of a product that is different from the quality objective. Objective quality refers to the nature of the products/services, processes, and technical, measurable, and verifiable quality orders. Consumers use quality attributes as a benchmark for the quality of a little-known product (Girard et al., 2017).

Gürhan-Canli, Hayran, and Sarial-Abi (2016) classify the concept of perceived quality into two groups of factors which are intrinsic attributes and extrinsic attributes. Intrinsic attributes relate to the physical aspects of a product (for example, color, flavor, shape, and appearance); on the one hand, extrinsic attributes are related to the product, but not in the physical part of it (for instance, brand name, information stamp of quality, price, store, packaging, and production) (Mohan et al., 2017).

Attributes are difficult to generalize because they are specific to product categories. In strong brands, brand equity is attached to the actual quality of the product or service and various intangible factors. These intangible things include "imagery" user (the type of person who uses the mark); imagery of use (the type of situations in which the mark is used); the type of personality that the mark describes

(sincere, exciting, competent, rugged); the feeling that the brand is trying to get in customers (helpful, warm); and the type of relationship it seeks to establish with its customers. Perceived quality has a direct influence on consumers' word of mouth (Davčik, 2013).

2.1.4 Brand Association

According to previous studies, brand association embraces the association of information in consumers' minds. This information reflects an association between a range of aspects and the brand in the mind of the consumer. Brand associations have been advertised as critical components in developing a brand image and empirical studies have shown that brand associations lead to the formation of a distinct brand image in the minds of consumers (Garanti & Kissi, 2019). It has been verified that brand association has a direct influence on consumers' behaviors especially the positive word of mouth.

A set of associations, usually organized in some meaningful way, forms a brand image. While some customers may attach greater importance to functional benefits, emotional value helps the brand stand above others. Building brand associations requires the company to understand its brand as well as the competitor's brands through customer research (Jayasuriya & Azam, 2018).

When analyzing the brand equity, it is necessary to identify the associations attributed to the same brand. As we have seen previously, associations constitute the intersection of information and containing the meaning of the brand for the consumer. Yang and Basile (2019) distinguishes three categories of brand associations: attributes, benefits, and attitude towards the brand.

First, attributes are related to the characteristics of the product or service. These are divided into two sub-categories: product-related attributes and non-product-related attributes. Product-related attributes relate to the physical composition of the product while non-product attributes are considered to be aspects external to the product such as price, packaging, type of people who use this product, and type of situations in which the product is used. These last two attributes can have the highest impact on consumers' word of mouth (Jayasuriya & Azam, 2018).

Roy and Sarkar (2015) offered a slightly different classification of brand associations. This is divided into three types of associations: functional, symbolic, and experiential associations. Firstly, functional associations are based on tangible elements such as product characteristics, secondly, symbolic associations are based on intangible and subjective elements such as brand personality, and thirdly, experiential associations correspond to the individual's experience with the brand both in visiting points of sale and in using products or services. These three types of associations are proven to have a direct positive influence on consumers' word of mouth (Evans et al., 2018).

2.1.5 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is at the heart of brand equity. It is the main component. From an attitudinal perspective, "brand loyalty is defined as a tendency to be loyal to a principal brand as demonstrated by the intention to purchase it and recommend it to others as a primary choice". According to Grant et al. (2014), brand loyalty adds considerable value to a brand and its company because it provides a set of repeat buyers for a long time. Loyal customers are less likely to switch to a competitor just because of the price; they

also make more frequent purchases than comparable non-loyal customers, they recommend this brand to others and spread positive word of mouth (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018).

Brand loyalty cannot be analyzed without considering its relationship to other dimensions of brand equity such as awareness, perceived quality, or associations. First, all of the other descriptive dimensions of brand equity can increase brand loyalty, such as perceived quality, associations and awareness provide reasons to buy and affect satisfaction. Loyalty could have resulted from the perceived quality or associations of a brand, but could also occur independently (Lobschat et al., 2013). On the one hand, loyalty can induce higher perceived quality (for example, a potential customer has a better evaluation of a brand if that brand is perceived as having a loyal customer base), stronger associations (the brand can be associated with the elements that characterize its loyal customers), or increasing awareness (loyal customers tend to provide brand exposure to new customers through “word of mouth”). Thus, brand loyalty is an input and an outcome of brand equity and it is influenced by and influences the other descriptive dimensions of brand equity. But above all, brand loyalty has the highest impact on consumers’ word of mouth (Chiu et al., 2017).

2.2 Consumers Word of Mouth

Word of mouth is a phenomenon that has a potential impact on consumer behavior and is defined as interpersonal, formal, or informal communication between people about a product, brand, or service. Moreover, this type of communication can go beyond a simple discussion and include recommendations or even the defense of a company’s products or services. As for Consiglio, de Angelis, and Costabile, (2018) and Mikalef, Giannakos, and Pateli, (2013) propose the following definition of word of mouth “It is about the transmission of positive or negative information on the service offered by a company”.

The authors consider that the loyal customer is not the one who buys only the product or service but rather the one who speaks favorably to those around him. On the other hand, research has shown that satisfied and dissatisfied customers express their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction informally through word of mouth. Dissatisfied customers tend to favor this type of communication to express their dissatisfaction. In the literature, some consider word of mouth to be a component of loyalty. Others oppose it, seeing it as a consequence. Therefore, positive word of mouth is a privileged vector to win new customers (Saad Aslam, 2011).

Marketing practitioners are interested in word of mouth because it seems to play an important role in the purchasing decision process of consumers, in particular for products considered to be at risk because of their perception of high credibility by the consumer (Fu, Ju, & Hsu, 2015).

Table 1. Definitions

| Definitions | Author |
|---|---|
| “An ‘informal’ oral communication from unrelated people to a commercial source about a brand, product, or service.” | (Richins, 2012) |
| “Negative word of mouth is defined as a response to dissatisfaction.” | |
| “Word of mouth is defined according to two levels, that is to say, the macro-level which corresponds to the flow of communications through groups and the micro-level which is defined as being the flow of information between groups. dyads or small groups.” | (Consiglio et al., 2018) |
| “Word of mouth represents conversations driven by salient experiences.” | (Liu et al., 2017) |
| “A Process Generated by Post-Purchase Communication.” | (Fu, Ju, & Hsu, 2015) |
| “Swan & Oliver “Word of mouth is defined as a type of post-purchase communication.” | |
| “Negative word of mouth corresponds to interpersonal communication exhibited following a complaint or dissatisfaction.” | (Viglia, Minazzi, & Buhalis, 2016) |
| “Word of mouth is conceptualized as a group phenomenon, an exchange of comments of thoughts, ideas between two or more individuals, neither of whom is considered a marketing source.” | (Viglia et al., 2016) (Sandes & Urdan, 2013) |

Word of mouth is informal communication about services or products between individuals who are independent of the company offering the services and products in a medium also perceived to be independent of the company. Word of mouth is produced by a third party and transmitted spontaneously in a manner that is independent of the producer or seller (Rosario et al., 2016).

This section concludes that the brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty are the major dimensions and pillars of brand equity, these dimensions have a direct influence on consumers’ word of mouth. Therefore, brand equity creates a competitive advantage and value for the company and consumers. Finally, as a general review of the literature, brand equity is made up of positive, unique, solid, and preeminent associations with consumers’ word of mouth. However, brand equity is explained by an additional utility for customers who are considering choosing a brand, recommend it to others. This utility is seen as the presence in consumers’ minds is strong, positive, and unique associations that create a positive attitude towards the brand as well as a preference for it and vice versa. This literature review leads to the construction of the following research hypotheses and the research conceptual model.

2.3 Research Hypotheses

H.1: Brand Awareness

- **H.1 0:** brand awareness has no significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth.
- **H.1 A:** brand awareness has a positive significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth.

H.2: Brand Image

- **H.2 0:** brand image has no significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth.
- **H.2 A:** brand image has a positive significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth.

H.3: Perceived Quality

- **H.3 0:** perceived quality has no significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth.
- **H.3 A:** perceived quality has a positive significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth.

H.4: Brand Association

- **H.4 0:** the brand association has no significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth.
- **H.4 A:** the brand association has a positive significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth.

H.5: Brand Loyalty

- **H.5 0:** brand loyalty has no significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth.
- **H.5 A:** brand loyalty has a positive significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

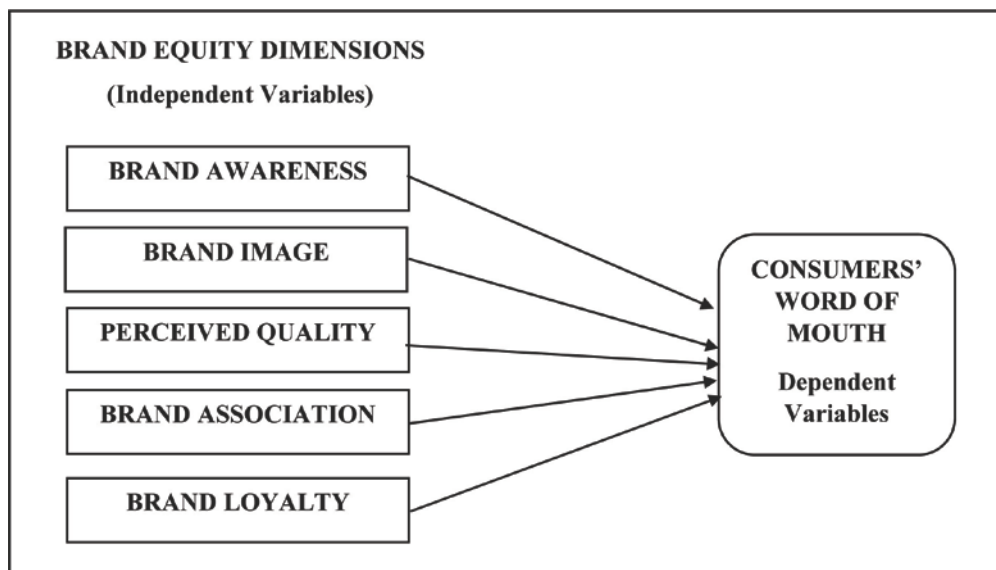


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3. Research Method

This section is dedicated to the development of the research method that was to respond to the research question, reach the research objective, and test the research hypotheses. To start, positivism as a research philosophy is selected for this article. This philosophy suits well the research characteristics for the following reasons. Positivism characterizes, as a concept, an epistemological attitude which implies that all science starts from observable facts (Jantzen, 2016). According to the literature review, it is observed that brand equity dimensions have a direct influence on consumers' word of mouth. This observable fact is supported by the theory of brand equity. Besides, the criterion of the truth of positivism relies on empirical verification, which is applied in this article through the quantitative approach. The experimental method is, therefore, characterized by the statistical processing of data. Also, this philosophy supports the causal method (Caldwell, 2015).

Consequently, the design of this study is causal. This choice aims to deepen the understanding of a brand equity and consumers' word of mouth by determining, from the research hypotheses, the nature of the relationship between the causal variables and the outcome to be expected (Keuth, 2015). This study is interested in deepening the understanding of brand equity in marketing, and its influence on consumers' word of mouth as human behaviors.

In the context of this article, the objective is to determine whether the brand equity dimensions as independent variables are the cause of the increase of positive word of mouth as an independent marketing phenomenon. A causal type model was therefore used since hypotheses are tested to validate whether there are a cause and effect relationship between variables.

To establish the causal associations, the data collected was subjected to quantitative analysis. This type of research model is framed by a formal, structured, and rigorous process compared to an exploratory study where the approach is more flexible and informal since the final objective is not to reach conclusions, but rather to understand a problem (Oleinik, 2011).

This article follows the deduction research approach. In the deductive mode, specific hypotheses associating brand equity dimensions with consumers' word of mouth were formulated through an extensive literature review. Then, data were collected by using a quantitative method based on a structured questionnaire as a survey to test the research hypotheses (Shareia, 2015).

3.1 Questionnaire

The structured questionnaire as a survey tool was chosen because it is a practical technique to quickly collect information from Lebanese consumers. This questionnaire embraces a series of formalized questions (statements) for each of the studied variables, intending to obtain information from respondents (Roopa & Rani, 2012). First of all, the questionnaire was written in English. However, to make it easier for respondents to understand, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic. Statements were structured and took the form of multiple-choice and the Likert scale. To standardize the scale, variables were measured on the five points of the Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Performing a pretest is essential before data collection. The questionnaire was pre-tested with ten Lebanese consumers. This technique tested all aspects of the questionnaire, including the content of the questions, their wording, the sequence, the form, and the arrangement, the difficulty of the questions. Identified deficiencies were corrected (De Winter & Dodou, 2012). The questionnaire was administered using a convenience sampling procedure. It was also verified with three experts specialized in the field of marketing. The questionnaire is carried out in direct administration. In other words, the questionnaire was submitted directly, face to face, to Lebanese consumers in shopping malls.

3.2 Operational Definition of Variables

The statements used in this study have been previously used in the literature, and empirically validated by previous researches which testify to their validity. The table presented below presents the original scales used, the items, and the authors supporting these statements.

Table 2. Operational Definition of Variables

| Independent Variables | Operational definition | Author |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| Brand Awareness | Nine statements evaluating the level of awareness of sports goods, their logo, and the type of product in the Lebanese consumers' minds. | (Baalbaki & Guzmán, 2016) (Im et al., 2012) |
| Brand Image | Eight statements assessing aspects related to the brand image embracing the recognition of the logo, its color, and the association with other sport goods brands | (Mishra, Dash, & Cyr, 2014); |
| Perceived Quality | Six statements measuring the quality of the sport goods brands, its functionality, and the relationship between price and quality. | (Evans et al., 2016) (Algharabat et al., 2020) |
| Brand Association | Six statements evaluating the brand association of sports good brand in the consumers' mind and its association with their expectations. | (Bose, Roy, & Tiwari, 2016); (Algharabat et al., 2020) |
| Brand Loyalty | Seven statements measuring the extent of consumers' brand loyalty to sport good. | (Bose et al., 2016); (Algharabat et al., 2020) |
| Dependent Variables | Operational definition | Author |
| Consumers word of mouth | Eight statements assessing the level of recommendation to other consumers, their advice, and the level of spreading details on sport goods brands. | (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012); (Liu et al., 2017) |

3.3 Sampling Procedure (Sample Selection and Characteristics)

Lebanese participants were selected using the convenience sampling procedure; a non-probability sampling method (Kalton, 2011). Essentially, this type of sampling procedure consists of selecting individuals showing the will to fill the questionnaire at their convenience.

In total, 1000 individuals answered the questionnaire. Among the latter, 200 questionnaires were removed from the sample due to a lack of data. Thus, the results of this study are carried out on a total sample of 800 individuals (n = 800).

The socio-demographic questions aim to target and segment respondents according to social or demographic characteristics (Gentles et al., 2015). The results thus allow a general description of the respondents to be made. For this study, the socio-demographic description of respondents is analyzed according to gender, age, marital status, level of education, occupation, and monthly income.

Table 3. Sample Characteristics

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Valid Gender | Male | 401 | 50.1 | 50.1 | 50.1 |
| | Female | 399 | 49.9 | 49.9 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 800 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| Valid Age | 18-22 years | 4 | .5 | .5 | .5 |
| | 23-27 years | 123 | 15.4 | 15.4 | 15.9 |
| | 28-32 years | 153 | 19.1 | 19.1 | 35.0 |
| | 33-37 years | 140 | 17.5 | 17.5 | 52.5 |
| | 38-42 years | 72 | 9.0 | 9.0 | 61.5 |
| | 43-47 years | 140 | 17.5 | 17.5 | 79.0 |
| | 48-52 years | 164 | 20.5 | 20.5 | 99.5 |
| | Above 58 years | 4 | .5 | .5 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 800 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| Valid Marital status | Single | 120 | 15.0 | 15.0 | 15.0 |
| | married | 396 | 49.5 | 49.5 | 64.5 |
| | divorced | 157 | 19.6 | 19.6 | 84.1 |
| | Widowed | 127 | 15.9 | 15.9 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 800 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| Valid Education | Primary education | 139 | 17.4 | 17.4 | 17.4 |
| | secondary | 125 | 15.6 | 15.6 | 33.0 |
| | Technical education | 152 | 19.0 | 19.0 | 52.0 |
| | Bachelor degree | 222 | 27.8 | 27.8 | 79.8 |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|
| | Master's degree | 135 | 16.9 | 16.9 | 96.6 |
| | Post-graduate, Ph.D. | 27 | 3.4 | 3.4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 800 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| Valid | Unemployed | 167 | 20.9 | 20.9 | 20.9 |
| Occupation | Student | 56 | 7.0 | 7.0 | 27.9 |
| | Employee | 290 | 36.3 | 36.3 | 64.1 |
| | I own my work | 166 | 20.8 | 20.8 | 84.9 |
| | Housewife | 69 | 8.6 | 8.6 | 93.5 |
| | Retired | 52 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 800 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| Valid | Less than 650.000 L.B.P | 56 | 7.0 | 7.0 | 7.0 |
| Income | Between 650.000 and 749.000 L.B.P | 83 | 10.4 | 10.4 | 17.4 |
| | Between 750.000 and 849.000 L.B.P | 97 | 12.1 | 12.1 | 29.5 |
| | Between 850.000 and 949.000 L.B.P | 194 | 24.3 | 24.3 | 53.8 |
| | Between 950.000 and 1049.000 L.B.P | 166 | 20.8 | 20.8 | 74.5 |
| | Between 1050.000 and 1149.000 L.B.P | 69 | 8.6 | 8.6 | 83.1 |
| | Between 1150.000 and 1249.000 L.B.P | 81 | 10.1 | 10.1 | 93.3 |
| | Above 1250.000 L.B.P | 54 | 6.8 | 6.8 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 800 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

- **Gender:** the sample is equally distributed between men and women. This sample takes into consideration the point of view of both genders giving them an equal opportunity in this study.
- **Age:** the sample is indeed diversified and incorporates participants of all ages. Indeed, 19.1% of participants are aged between 28-32 years, 17.5 % are aged between 33-37 years and 20.5% of them are aged between 48-52 years and only 0.5 % are aged above 58 years.
- **Marital Status:** the above table shows that the majority of participants are married, this category represents (n = 396 out of 800; 49.5%). This verifies that this study considers the perspective of families as major Lebanese consumers.
- **Education:** the selected sample is educated, 19% of participants have Technical education, 27.8% have a Bachelor's degree, and 16.9% have a Master's degree. This verifies that consumers are aware of the studied concept and can evaluate it objectively, shows that nearly two-thirds of the respondents have a university education and nearly a third of the respondents have a college education.

- **Occupation:** Regarding the main occupation of respondents presented in the above table 36.3% are employees, 20.8% own their work and 20.9% are unemployed.
- **Income:** the table above shows the distribution of the sample according to their monthly income. Participants have an average monthly income according to the current economic situation. The majority of 24.3% have an average income between 850.000 and 949.000 L.B.P and only 6.8% have an income Above 1250.000 L.B.P.

4. Findings and Interpretations

This section displays the empirical results obtained. First, the reliability and validity of the scales are presented. Next, the hypotheses are tested using the one-way ANOVA and verified using the multiple linear regression (stepwise). Results were obtained from the statistical software SPSS V.25.

The table below shows that the alpha coefficients are all above 0.6 and therefore considered to be representative with satisfactory internal consistency. The scale measuring brand loyalty is the one with the highest reliability given that it has the highest alpha coefficient, 0.898.

Table 4. Reliability and Validity Analysis Statistics

| Variables | Cronbach's Alpha | KMO | Bartlett test | N of Items |
|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------|--|------------|
| Brand Awareness | .672 | .786 | Approx. Chi-Square: 29.356 Sig.: .000 | 9 |
| Brand Image | .730 | .818 | Approx. Chi-Square: 84.078 Sig.: .000 | 8 |
| Perceived Quality | .750 | .827 | Approx. Chi-Square: 18.473 Sig.: .000 | 6 |
| Brand Association | .814 | .881 | Approx. Chi-Square: 94.354 Sig.: .000 | 6 |
| Brand Loyalty | .898 | .937 | Approx. Chi-Square: 67.332 Sig.: .000 | 7 |
| Consumers word of mouth | .814 | .778 | Approx. Chi-Square: 818.547 Sig.: .000 | 8 |

The use of Cronbach's alpha verified the reliability of the scale. To be accurate, items that measure a variable must have internal reliability. Cronbach's alpha should vary from 0 to 1. The closer a coefficient is to 1 then, the more the measurement scale is considered to be reliable. A coefficient of 0.6 or more indicates good internal reliability.

The Kaiser Mayer Olkin (KMO) test was used to measure the correlations between items. This, varying from 0 to 1, gives additional information to the correlation matrix. Results higher than 0.5 are considered satisfactory. A high adequacy index means that factor analysis is relevant (Goforth, 2015).

The Bartlett test made it possible to determine the dependence of items. The test must be significant ($p < 0.050$) so that the correlation matrix does not equal the identity matrix. This test is used to justify the use of factor analysis. The test proved to be significant ($p < 0.050$) helping to reject the null hypothesis claiming that items are perfectly independent of each other. Then, for the quality of the correlations between the items, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sample fit index (KMO), varying from 0.778 to 0.937, gives additional information to the correlation matrix. Results are higher than 0.5 and considered satisfactory.

4.1 Correlation Matrix

A correlation matrix was carried out on the symmetrical variables of this study. The correlation matrix measures the covariance between two variables. It is from the Pearson coefficient (r), varying from 0 to 1, that it is possible to determine the presence of a significant linear relationship (Malhotra, 2011). The strength of the variance is measured according to the coefficient that is to say when it is 0, it means that there is no relation between the variables, and when it is 1, there is relation between the variables. The direction of the relation can also be measured by the coefficient according to whether it is positive, the variables covariate in the same direction, or if it is negative the variables covariate in the opposite direction. The below table shows the correlation matrix.

Table 5. Correlations

| | | Brand Awareness | Brand Image | Brand Associations | Brand Loyalty | Perceived Quality |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Brand Image | Pearson Correlation | .220** | 1 | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | | | | |
| | N | 800 | 800 | | | |
| Brand Associations | Pearson Correlation | .070* | .263** | 1 | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .049 | .000 | | | |
| | N | 800 | 800 | 800 | | |
| Brand Loyalty | Pearson Correlation | .328** | .031 | .007 | 1 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .384 | .843 | | |
| | N | 800 | 800 | 800 | 800 | |
| Perceived Quality | Pearson Correlation | .270** | .046 | .156** | .300** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .191 | .000 | .000 | |
| | N | 800 | 800 | 800 | 800 | 800 |
| Customers Word of Mouth | Pearson Correlation | .249** | .532** | .468** | .029 | .050 |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | .414 | .157 |
| N | 800 | 800 | 800 | 800 | 800 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The above table shows that there is a strong yet moderated relationship between brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, brand association, brand loyalty, and consumers' word of mouth meaning that the variability of one of these variables greatly results in the variability of the others.

4.2 Hypothesis Tests

4.2.1 Analysis of Variance One-Way ANOVA

The objective of an analysis of variance (ANOVA) is to compare the means while observing the differences in the variations of these means for each of the groups. In the present study, an analysis of variance is performed for the hypotheses to observe the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The following table represents the one-way ANOVA relationship between each of the independent variables and the dependent variable respectively.

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA

| | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| Brand Awareness | Between Groups | 62.408 | 22 | 2.837 | 4.242 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 519.627 | 777 | .669 | | |
| | Total | 582.035 | 799 | | | |
| Brand Image | Between Groups | 217.654 | 16 | 13.603 | 29.232 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 364.381 | 783 | .465 | | |
| | Total | 582.035 | 799 | | | |
| Perceived Quality | Between Groups | 52.993 | 18 | 2.944 | 4.346 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 529.042 | 781 | .677 | | |
| | Total | 582.035 | 799 | | | |
| Brand Association | Between Groups | 178.413 | 12 | 14.868 | 28.990 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 403.622 | 787 | .513 | | |
| | Total | 582.035 | 799 | | | |
| Brand Loyalty | Between Groups | 35.133 | 16 | 2.196 | 3.144 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 546.902 | 783 | .698 | | |
| | Total | 582.035 | 799 | | | |

The first step in interpreting the analysis verified that there is a relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable, because F test is statistically significant with a P value of $0.000 < 0.050$). Consequently, the null hypotheses are rejected and the alternative hypotheses are supported. H. 1 Brand Awareness ($F = 4.242$; $P = 0.000 < 0.05$), H. 2 Brand Image ($F = 29.232$; $P = 0.000 < 0.05$), H. 3 Perceived Quality ($F = 4.346$; $P = 0.000 < 0.05$), H. 4 Brand Association ($F = 28.990$; $P = 0.000 < 0.05$), and H. 5 Brand Loyalty ($F = 3.144$; $P = 0.000 < 0.05$),

4.2.2 Linear Regression (Stepwise)

The objective of linear regression is to measure the predictive effect of the independent variables. In the present study, a univariate linear regression is performed for the hypotheses. The results are shown in the tables below.

Table 7. Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | .532 ^a | .283 | .282 | .72320 |
| 2 | .631 ^b | .399 | .397 | .66263 |
| 3 | .645 ^c | .416 | .414 | .65351 |
| 4 | .658 ^d | .433 | .430 | .64445 |
| 5 | .660 ^e | .436 | .433 | .64286 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image, Brand Associations
 c. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image, Brand Associations, Brand Awareness
 d. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image, Brand Associations, Brand Awareness, Perceived Quality
 e. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image, Brand Associations, Brand Awareness, Perceived Quality, Brand Loyalty

- **Model 1:** The R square of (0.283) predicts that 28% of the variability in consumers' word of mouth is explained by the relevance of the brand image.
- **Model 2:** The R square of (0.399) predicts that 39% of the variability in consumers' word of mouth is explained by the relevance of the brand image and brand associations.
- **Model 3:** The R square of (0.416) predicts that 41% of the variability in consumers' word of mouth is explained by the relevance of the brand image, brand associations, and brand awareness.
- **Model 4:** The R square of (0.433) predicts that 43% of the variability in consumers' word of mouth is explained by the relevance of the brand image, brand associations, brand awareness, and perceived quality.

- **Model 5:** The R square of (0.436) predicts that 43% of the variability in consumers' word of mouth is explained by the relevance of the brand image, brand associations, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty.

Table 8. ANOVA

| | Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|--------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Regression | 164.666 | 1 | 164.666 | 314.838 | .000^b |
| | Residual | 417.369 | 798 | .523 | | |
| | Total | 582.035 | 799 | | | |
| 2 | Regression | 232.085 | 2 | 116.043 | 264.283 | .000^c |
| | Residual | 349.950 | 797 | .439 | | |
| | Total | 582.035 | 799 | | | |
| 3 | Regression | 242.079 | 3 | 80.693 | 188.941 | .000^d |
| | Residual | 339.956 | 796 | .427 | | |
| | Total | 582.035 | 799 | | | |
| 4 | Regression | 251.857 | 4 | 62.964 | 151.605 | .000^e |
| | Residual | 330.178 | 795 | .415 | | |
| | Total | 582.035 | 799 | | | |
| 5 | Regression | 253.895 | 5 | 50.779 | 122.870 | .000^f |
| | Residual | 328.140 | 794 | .413 | | |
| | Total | 582.035 | 799 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: Customers Word of Mouth
b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image
c. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image, Brand Associations
d. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image, Brand Associations, Brand Awareness
e. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image, Brand Associations, Brand Awareness, Perceived Quality
f. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image, Brand Associations, Brand Awareness, Perceived Quality, Brand Loyalty

Results demonstrated that it is possible to reject the null hypothesis according to the analysis of variance since the F test is statistically significant ($p < 0.050$). Therefore, the relevance of the publication influences the perception of the brand. The five models calculated in the multiple linear regression stepwise reject null hypotheses since the F test is statistically significant ($p < 0.050$).

Table 9. Coefficients

| Model | | Unstandardized | | Standardized | | Collinearity | | |
|-------|--------------------|----------------|------------|--------------|--------|--------------|-----------|-------|
| | | Coefficients | | Coefficients | | Statistics | | |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. | Tolerance | VIF |
| 1 | (Constant) | 2.102 | .103 | | 20.389 | .000 | | |
| | Brand Image | .438 | .025 | .532 | 17.744 | .000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| 2 | (Constant) | 1.403 | .110 | | 12.750 | .000 | | |
| | Brand Image | .361 | .023 | .439 | 15.425 | .000 | .931 | 1.074 |
| | Brand Associations | .272 | .022 | .353 | 12.391 | .000 | .931 | 1.074 |
| 3 | (Constant) | 1.981 | .161 | | 12.269 | .000 | | |
| | Brand Image | .338 | .024 | .410 | 14.283 | .000 | .890 | 1.123 |
| | Brand Associations | .270 | .022 | .351 | 12.503 | .000 | .931 | 1.074 |
| | Brand Awareness | .125 | .026 | .134 | 4.837 | .000 | .952 | 1.051 |
| 4 | (Constant) | 1.369 | .203 | | 6.741 | .000 | | |
| | Brand Image | .320 | .024 | .388 | 13.554 | .000 | .869 | 1.151 |
| | Brand Associations | .289 | .022 | .375 | 13.340 | .000 | .901 | 1.110 |
| | Brand Awareness | .162 | .027 | .175 | 6.101 | .000 | .872 | 1.147 |
| | Perceived Quality | .193 | .040 | .138 | 4.852 | .000 | .886 | 1.128 |
| 5 | (Constant) | 1.277 | .207 | | 6.175 | .000 | | |
| | Brand Image | .320 | .024 | .388 | 13.586 | .000 | .869 | 1.151 |
| | Brand Associations | .286 | .022 | .371 | 13.202 | .000 | .897 | 1.114 |
| | Brand Awareness | .178 | .027 | .192 | 6.485 | .000 | .811 | 1.233 |
| | Perceived Quality | .171 | .041 | .122 | 4.199 | .000 | .836 | 1.195 |
| | Brand Loyalty | .168 | .031 | .165 | 2.220 | .000 | .840 | 1.191 |

a. Dependent Variable: Customers Word of Mouth

The above table classifies variables according to its significance (stepwise). It shows that brand image is the most significant variable that has a direct influence on consumers' word of mouth. Its followed by brand associations, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. The BETA confirms that when relevance increases by 1, on a 5-point scale, consumers' word of mouth increases. The beta is positive which concludes that the relationship between the variables is positive. This shows the following (fifth model).

- **Brand Image:** The positive b (0.320) confirms that when brand image increases by 32%, consumers' word of mouth increases by 0.38. (B = 0.320; SB = 0.388; P = 0.000 < 0.05)

- **Brand Associations:** The positive b (0.286) confirms that when brand association increases by 28%, consumers' word of mouth increases by 0.37. (B = 0.286; SB = 0.371; P = 0.000 < 0.05)
- **Brand Awareness:** The positive b (0.178) confirms that when brand association increases by 17%, consumers' word of mouth increases by 0.19. (B = 0.178; SB = 0.192; P = 0.000 < 0.05)
- **Perceived Quality:** The positive b (0.171) confirms that when brand association increases by 17%, consumers' word of mouth increases by 0.12. (B = 0.171; SB = 0.122; P = 0.000 < 0.05)
- **Brand Loyalty:** The positive b (0.168) confirms that when brand association increases by 16%, consumers' word of mouth increases by 0.16. (B = 0.168; SB = 0.165; P = 0.000 < 0.05)

The above table leads to the formulation of the following research equation based on the fifth model. The predicted variation in consumers' word of mouth is equal to $1.277 + (\text{Brand Image} \times .320) + (\text{Brand Associations} \times .286) + (\text{Brand Awareness} \times .178) + (\text{Perceived Quality} \times .171) + (\text{Brand Loyalty} \times .068)$.

To conclude, all the hypotheses of the present study are established and supported. The summary of the hypotheses' tests is presented in the table below.

Table 10. Summary of the Hypotheses Testing Results

| Variable | Hypotheses | Test result |
|------------------------|--|------------------|
| H.1: Brand Awareness | H.1 0: brand awareness has no significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth. | Rejected |
| | H.1 A: brand awareness has a positive significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth. | Supported |
| H.2: Brand Image | H.2 0: brand image has no significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth. | Rejected |
| | H.2 A: brand image has a positive significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth. | Supported |
| H.3: Perceived Quality | H.3 0: perceived quality has no significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth. | Rejected |
| | H.3 A: perceived quality has a positive significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth. | Supported |
| H.4: Brand Association | H.4 0: the brand association has no significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth. | Rejected |
| | H.4 A: the brand association has a positive significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth. | Supported |
| H.5: Brand Loyalty | H.5 0: brand loyalty has no significant statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth. | Rejected |

H.5 A: brand loyalty has a positive significant statistical **Supported**
influence on consumers' word of mouth.

4.3 Interpretation

A brand is considered to have positive capital based on brand equity dimensions when consumers react favorably to the product and its marketing once they have identified the brand. In other words, when consumers have high brand awareness, brand association toward the brand image, and its perceived quality, they create brand loyalty towards the company and its products forming a positive capital. These results were verified in the empirical study. Empirical results are supported by the outcome of (Godey et al., 2016), (Ansary & Nik Hashim, 2018), (Augusto & Torres, 2018) and (Lin, Wu, & Chen, 2013). Contrarywise, this capital could be negative if the reaction of consumers is less favorable when they are not aware of this brand, its image, or any of its perceived qualities. These results are supported by the (Romani, Grappi, & Dalli, 2012) (Kähr et al., 2016) (Beneke et al., 2015); (Podnar & Javernik, 2012). However, these results contradict the results found in the article.

This study supports that brand equity dimensions have a positive influence on consumers' word of mouth. It verified that brand image had the highest impact on the increase of positive word of mouth, followed by brand associations, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. The ranking of these dimensions was verified by the multiple linear regression stepwise. Therefore, marketing managers should focus on brand equity dimensions to increase positive consumers' word of mouth. They should create a motive to incite consumers to recommend products to their friends or acquaintances to reach their ultimate marketing objective and increase their sales.

This study as well as the study of (Hudson et al., 2016); (Vahdati & Nejad, 2016); (Krishnamurthy & Kumar, 2018), supports that brand equity is an added value and a competitive advantage the brand brings to the products. Customer-based brand equity is the difference brought about by brand awareness in the way consumers react to the product and its marketing. This difference in reaction comes from consumers' awareness of the brand. marketers are therefore interested in all the thoughts, feelings, images, experiences, beliefs that are associated. Brands should try to create strong, supportive, and specific mental associations in the minds of customers. Brand equity is built on all interactions between the brand and consumers, whether or not they are initiated by the company.

Brand equity dimensions are the foundation of the product image, brand association, and recognition. When customers learn about products and don't read their descriptions, components should highlight their main benefits, as well as the personality and brand values so that consumers associate their expectations with the product. The more intangible the benefits, the more important the components of the brand are to achieve this communication objective. Consequently, each of these dimensions reinforces the brand itself and increase the spread of consumers' positive word of mouth.

- **The brand image** has the highest direct statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth. It depends on consumers' experience with the brand, positive experience creates a positive brand

image in consumers' minds. One of the key success factors for the brand image is simplicity. Marketers should not overwhelm the product with an overabundance of information but focus on a simple logo as a major pillar to create a consistent brand image.

- **Brand associations** have a direct statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth, this influence is positive which means that when the brand association in consumers' minds is positive, they increase their positive recommendations for this brand. Word of mouth in the form of recommendations is related to the characteristics of the product and the functional or emotional benefits associated with its use.
- **Brand awareness** has a direct positive statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth. It creates the feeling of familiarity, of a close relationship capable of reassuring consumers and encouraging them to choose, among a set of competing brands, the one they know best. Hence, when consumers are well aware of the product, they tend to positively recommend it to others.
- **The perceived quality** has a direct statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth. It forms a criterion, which allows the consumer to classify the different brands among themselves, according to their level of performance, and thus to make an initial selection. Therefore, products with high perceived quality meeting consumers' expectations are highly recommended to other consumers. Hence, perceived quality increases consumers' word of mouth.
- **The brand loyalty** has a direct statistical influence on consumers' word of mouth, it translates into an undeniable competitive advantage, as it reduces prospecting costs generated by finding new customers; besides, a high loyalty rate delays the entry of new competitors into the market, because the commercial investment that is necessary to make to distract from their usual brand customers, who seem satisfied, is often restricted. Loyal consumers are ambassadors, they have high consistency, they buy the same product they are used to and recommend these products to others.

Consequently, referral marketing is a "word-of-mouth" marketing strategy that grows a business's audience by tapping into its existing customer networks. It is a promotional strategy in which a business prompts the consumer to recommend it to friends, family, and others in their social circles.

If word-of-mouth occurs on its own (when a person simply talks in good terms about a product, store, or brand and recommends them to others), recommendation marketing refers specifically to a marketing strategy whereby companies intentionally generate recommendations.

Accordingly, word of mouth generated from effective brand equity dimensions, is the natural dissemination of information, opinions from one person to another about a product, a story, an experience, related to a brand. Highly aware and loyal consumers recommend products based on their perceived quality and promote the business if they are satisfied.

To conclude, consumers' word of mouth as a marketing strategy refers to marketing initiatives that actively influence and encourage word of mouth discussions about your brand, business, or products. It

is triggered voluntarily by a viral communication campaign. Here, the message disseminated will be picked up by a wider audience and will be even more amplified. However, it is difficult to know in advance whether the amplification of the message will match the objectives or even be positive.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

Although word-of-mouth has been around for many years and much research has been done in the construction field, the study of consumers' word of mouth measurement remains recent. Consumers' word of mouth as a marketing strategy is well known in the world, word-of-mouth demonstrated its great capabilities and remains the most effective advertising technique. Considered the first channel of transmission to pass from family to close friends via the professional sphere, it can just as much encourage the promotion of business as tarnish its reputation through negative opinions when the brand equity dimensions are ineffective. The main objective of this article was to verify the relationship between brand equity dimensions and consumers' word-of-mouth, which has been accomplished. Consequently, leveraging brand equity dimensions notably, brand image, brand associations, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty allow the development of positive consumers' word of mouth.

The brand equity dimensions are not evaluated in segregation but comparison with other brands in the market with the same target of customers or users. A good brand image, brand association, and brand awareness are the guarantee of a good knowledge of the brand's products by its consumer and it influences their word of mouth. These dimensions do not guarantee purchases, but well-implemented dimensions are considered as necessary, conditions for success. It is consumers who create and recognize the brand value. Brand equity dimensions are valuable assets to facilitate information and information processing for the consumer; these assets increase the spread of positive word of mouth, leveraging confidence for new consumers and therefore securing the purchase decision.

Despite its explanatory and causal nature, this research contributes to the advancement of the study on the causal relationship between brand equity dimensions and consumers' word of mouth. From a managerial point of view, this article provides an interesting strategic tool for managers wishing to understand, analyze the word-of-mouth and major factors affecting it. It represents an important resource on which managers can base their marketing strategy as well as in its implementation.

Today, marketers must change their vision and have as main communication objectives to promote the elements of brand equity to educate and inform consumers as opposed to the objective of selling the products. Thus, marketing communications must focus more on the needs of consumers than on the needs of the business.

Today, the brand is more than just a name or logo. It relies on solid equity and dimensions. It generates different associations; attribute personality traits to it and speak more readily of long-term relationships with consumers than of a single transaction. Brands convey emotional values and associations with

their loyal consumers. In short, they can offer consumers a whole host of experiences, positive or negative. Consumers are no longer satisfied with advertising messages and are increasingly interested in everything that revolves around the brand: the composition of its products, the history of the company, the behavior of the company towards environmental issues, its labor policy, including its positions on other economic, social and political issues. Today, companies and their brands are more than ever in the spotlight.

5.2 Recommendations

Word of mouth is the simplest, most effective, and most powerful trading technique. It is a determining factor in boosting sales while taking into consideration the applicable condition and strategic actions.

To develop word of mouth, one must understand the mechanism of positive word of mouth. Positive word of mouth promotes sales and strengthens the image of the company through effective brand equity dimensions. Therefore, the following practices are recommended.

- **Offer a customer-oriented innovation:** this is the best way to develop word of mouth. If your product or service is making life easier, then the news will spread like wildfire.
- **Take care of the quality of your products or services:** this is an essential condition for the word of mouth to develop. If the quality isn't there, there won't be a recommendation, although the idea is great. Marketers should strive to continuously improve the quality of products.
- **Supervise the quality of the customer relationship:** the keyword is speed; marketers must provide answers to customers as quickly as possible. Minimize the waiting phase to reduce the customer's uncertainty. It will generate positive consumers' word of mouth.

To leverage brand equity dimensions and improve the brand image, brand association, and brand awareness, brands need to be visible. This visibility should go beyond the traditional publicity by participating in events, relate to the business field.

- **Maintain consumer's satisfaction:** marketers should ensure that every customer is satisfied to transmit a good image of the company, and thus advertise and generate a positive word of mouth.
- **Have a unique visual identity:** companies must have a unique visual identity, through innovative logo, slogan, and a graphic charter. Prospects need to be able to easily recognize the brand with unique visual elements. This visual identity must also convey the brand image and the company's vision. These elements must be oriented according to the target to correspond to their expectations.
- **Adopt a philosophy:** marketing strategies must be developed through a well-defined philosophy, through a culture code containing values that are shared by all members of the company without exception. This philosophy will convey a strong and attractive image. It will attract customers and thus improve the brand image and brand awareness.

- **Retain loyal consumers:** companies have to nurture the experience of loyal consumer experience and retain them. If companies manage to retain their consumers satisfied with products, they become ambassadors of the brand and will surely recommend the company to others.

5.3 Study Limitation and Avenues for Future Research

Although, this article reached its objectives and answers the research question. This does not prevent it from facing minor limitations. Regarding the empirical part, starting with the questionnaire: it was very difficult to distribute the questionnaires, therefore, the data collection took three months to reach the adequate sample, a fairly large population was reached, incorporating as many profiles as possible to ensure generalizability.

Indeed, this research measured the relationship between brand equity dimensions and consumers word-of-mouth based on measurement scales developed from the literature review with very acceptable levels of reliability and validity. However, the need to improve this measurement scale in future research is imperative.

Finally, a comparative study, between the different brands operating in Lebanese shopping malls is recommended, the latter should incorporate additional factors and theories that influence consumers word of mouth and behaviors in the Lebanese context. Another avenue of research is to identify and test other explanatory variables such as electronic word of mouth.

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